

AIR|OBSERVER

the biannual journal of the 137th special operations wing

WE WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER

OKC BOMBING ANNIVERSARY | DOMESTIC OPERATIONS | FIRST RESPONDERS

WING COMMANDER
Col. Daniel R. Fowler

WING COMMAND CHIEF
Chief Master Sgt. Brian A. Brindle

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
Capt. Shanti C. Simon

PUBLIC AFFAIRS SUPERINTENDENT
Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux

PHOTOJOURNALIST
Tech. Sgt. Kasey M. Phipps
Staff Sgt. Brigitte A. Waltermire

BROADCAST JOURNALIST
Staff Sgt. Jordan E. Martin
Senior Airman Alex N. Kaelke

KNOWLEDGE OPERATIONS MANAGER
Staff Sgt. Caitlin G. Carnes

AIR OBSERVER ONLINE
Website: www.137sow.ang.af.mil
Facebook: /137SOW
Instagram: @137SOW
Email: usaf.ok.137-sow.list.pa@mail.mil

WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE
5624 Air Guard Drive
Oklahoma City, OK 73179
(405) 686-5227

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: OKLAHOMA CITY NATIONAL MEMORIAL,
OKLAHOMA CITY, MAY 2020

The next frame in my camera roll looks like this shot, just a little bluer. The landscaping lights turned off right after I took it. I looked it up later: The warm glow that surrounds 168 empty chairs at the Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial automatically goes off when sensors detect a certain amount of daylight — the chairs and the people they honor never sit in the dark. I was too young to remember the day the bombing occurred. Yet, it became an unforgettable part of my history because it's part of our collective Oklahoma history. Others from my generation who didn't live in Oklahoma don't really remember April 19, 1995 ... probably because they haven't lived here or studied it. But Oklahomans of all ages know. We set a standard together 25 years ago — the "Oklahoma Standard." A standard we uphold any time disaster strikes. A standard that means those names will never be left in the dark, because we will always remember.

Cover Photograph: STAFF SGT. BRIGETTE A. WALTERMIRE

Emergency Box
tem # 850900 USDA
Date: / /2020

REGIONAL
**FOOD
BANK**
of Oklahoma

- ☐ Backpacks
- ☐ Healthy Pantry
- ☐ Senior Pack
- ☐ Other

Date _____

04
Wing Commander
Col. Daniel R. Fowler

06
Fire Department
Senior Master Sgt. Scott L. Lair

08
Medical Group
Capt. Sara M. Willhight

10
Remembering the Oklahoma City Bombing
Story: Retired Col. Douglas D. Hayworth

16
Fire Protection
Story and Photography: Staff Sgt. Brigitte A. Waltermire

22
Defensor Fortis
Story: Tech. Sgt. Kasey M. Phipps

28
Bioenvironmental
Story and Photography: Tech. Sgt. Kasey M. Phipps

34
Let Me Tell You
Interviews: Staff Sgt. Brigitte A. Waltermire

05
Mission Support Group
Lt. Col. Judd K. Kroener

07
Security Forces
Capt. Johnny R. Riaz

09
Emergency Management
Master Sgt. Micah R. Jarrett

14
*Q&A: Personal Stories of
Guardsmen in the Community*
Lt. Col. Mark D. Hole

20
*Q&A: Personal Stories of
Guardsmen in the Community*
Senior Master Sgt. David E. Perez

26
*Q&A: Personal Stories of
Guardsmen in the Community*
Senior Master Sgt. Gary R. Hopcus

32
*Q&A: Personal Stories of
Guardsmen in the Community*
Tech. Sgt. Jordan A. Almohandis

36
Oklahoma Standard
Stories and Photography: Tech. Sgt. Kasey M. Phipps

Photograph: TECH. SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS



WING COMMANDER

COL. DANIEL R. FOWLER

It is both fortunate and timely that this edition is focused on first responders and our role in Domestic Operations (DOMOPS). Our official title of “Reserve Component” makes us an integral part of the United States’ emergency response — for the Department of Defense abroad and for civilian crises stateside. This is just one part of the unique role of our Title 32 military: we have two roles under the state and the nation. Additionally, Guard units have a distinct characteristic in the DoD that amplifies our DOMOPS capability — we actually have community first responders within our ranks. In this edition, you’re going to hear from some of our own responding Airmen who allow us a degree of knowledge, experience and connectivity with our state during a crisis that surpasses that of the more traditional active duty.

As part of the Crisis Action Team (CAT) at the Air National Guard Readiness Center (ANGRC), I’ve experienced multiple DOMOPS events from the command level such as hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria; wildfires; floods; and other events. Watching the National Guard’s response from the ANGRG was impressive and was always highly recognized by the DoD. Now, as wing commander, I’m seeing an event and preparing to respond at the “action end” of the command chain.

As I sit and write this, an entry about the dedication and discipline of our first responders, I am currently in self-quarantine (March 2020) because my leave from Europe was shortened due to COVID-19. This is an unprecedented time that will test us as an organization, a state and a nation, but our training and character have prepared us for these times.

I want to share with you a lesson I learned as a cadet at the Air Force Academy that has proven true multiple times over. During domestic crises, the public turns to the military for many reasons. However, one in particular stands out every time — our order and discipline. During times of crisis and panic, we plan with calculated precision, make decisions based upon risk mitigation and requirement for success, act with professional poise and dedication, and retain our chain of command and communication in order to maintain flexibility amidst the fog and friction.

I have absolute faith that by the time you are reading this, we will have proven and will continue to prove ourselves as that professional reserve in all aspects. You are that small percentage of the U.S. population that runs towards the panic, not away.

Your willingness to volunteer, wear the uniform and act for both the nation and the state while in crisis does you a great honor. As your commander, you do me great honor. I am proud to be the 137th Special Operations Wing commander. Thank you!

MISSION SUPPORT

LT. COL. JUDD K. KROENER

My first supervisor referred to challenges and experiences as simply “filling squares in a book of life.” Me as an 18-year-old ... honestly, I ignored most of it. Now, as I reflect on my 31 years of service and the chapters of “squares” contained therein, I see the brilliance in that statement. I have learned that neither our lives nor our careers are defined by a single event or square, but instead by segments of events all strung together. The chapters of accomplishment and success also contain subdivisions of hardship and regret — details of the all-too-normal ups and downs of life. Each part, no matter its size, has left an impression and has taught me important lessons of tolerance, patience, strength and trust.

On tolerance: I believe we all have the responsibility to foster an environment where others can thrive. As a leader, it means setting the conditions where a fair and open exchange of thoughts, ideas and opinions regularly occur — the very basis of tolerance. In my experience, the best organizations operate on the foundations of personal responsibility and respect, making the entire membership feel like part of a team. I have always tried to carry this approach, despite all the challenges we have faced. If my personnel felt comfortable sharing their concerns, I had successfully completed my task.

On patience: I read somewhere that patience is just managing your reactions while you wait. I have by no means mastered this idea, but I submit that this approach is as much about attitude as anything else. With all the change we have experienced in the Wing, it is understandable to get discouraged. Despite this, we must realize we cannot control the change, only how we respond to it. Whether a mission change, facility move or personnel challenge, approaching the matter with the right attitude and response will contribute positively to the desired end-state that can be beneficial to everyone.

On strength: One of the strengths of the Air National Guard is the retention of its most experienced members. It is commonplace for our members to spend decades in the Wing. One of the inevitabilities of this career longevity is the personnel challenges that go with it. The experience of a coworker who was on a clear path to success one day may find themselves on the other end of failure on the next. All of us need to reflect on our own “books” and recognize that some of life’s chapters are darker than others. Every career has its hills and its valleys. When “life” happens, we must have faith in the strength of the human condition and see the challenge as an endurance-building event. This is not to say the other side of the hill will hold the ideal answer, but we owe it to each other to wait and see.

On trust: Resisting the status quo and challenging norms are never-ending chapters. There is certainly no shortage of bad decisions out there. When we need them the most, the “right ones” are skillfully elusive. Sometimes, we are faced with making a decision that needs to be made quickly and may not be popular. It is in these times, that we hope and trust our training and judgment are in alignment with good intent. But in situations where we have the luxury of time, the trust of good counsel cannot be overstated. War-gaming ideas with a trusted advocate or advocates will always yield a better decision. Our core values create the foundation for trust in our organization; without it, we will not accomplish our mission.

My dad administered my oath of enlistment on April 17, 1989. I try every year on my anniversary to give him a call to remind him of this, which honestly turns out as more of a reminder of his age. This year during our call, I made a special note to say “thank you.” I wanted to thank him for encouraging me to enlist and be part of such a great organization and the effect it has had on my life. I reflect often on the last 31 years — the mission, the relationships and the squares I have filled. I am amazed every day at what is being accomplished and the Airmen in our midst. I, for one, look forward to the unopened chapters and challenges ahead.





FIRE DEPARTMENT

SENIOR MASTER SGT. SCOTT L. LAIR

April 19, 1995, was a day that has shaped my life, as it did so many others' lives. Sitting in a classroom in a small town just outside the metro, kids could feel shockwaves from their desks. In a time before smartphones and instantaneous communication, teachers and administrators gathered in the hallways to discuss what had happened. Dealing with the shock themselves, they, in turn, had the burden of telling the students about the tragedy that just occurred. In the weeks following, images of the event continued to flood the television. One in particular — the picture of fire Capt. Chris Fields carrying baby Baylee Almon — resonated with me.

After September 11, 2001, the all-too-familiar emotions once again made an impact and reminded me of the Oklahoma City Bombing. I personally felt uncertainty and helplessness, and I wanted to change that.

I knew then that my calling was to serve. I enlisted in the Air Force in Fire Protection soon after.

The years following the tragedy on April 19th continued to unfold and have shaped my professional career. Three years after I enlisted, my military training afforded me an opportunity to land my dream job at Tinker Air Force Base Fire Emergency Services as a firefighter. On the first day, I noticed a piece of granite from the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building engraved with "9:02 a.m. April 19, 1995 – TOGETHER." I learned that the Oklahoma City Fire Department (OKCFD) had distributed these to the responding fire departments. It rests outside the main station at Tinker AFB, mounted to a display under the American flag. This symbol signifies what I learned to be the foundation for who we are.

Years into my career as a young fire officer, I was able to attend an awards banquet where Oklahoma Highway Patrol trooper Charlie Hanger spoke. He gave his account of pulling over and capturing the man responsible for the attack. His message was simple: value and trust your training and do not get complacent. I took that message to heart and made that a priority as a lead firefighter.

Thirteen years into my career with the 137th Special Operations Wing Fire Department, I attended the state's fire school where one of the courses was instructed by the public information officer for the bombing. He gave his frontline account of the incident, focusing on initial decision actions and the difficulty faced when managing a scene and coordinating with multiple agencies. A total of 11 Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) teams responded that day.

Now, as Fire Chief of the 137th SOW Fire Department, I am focused on preparing the department for all types of emergencies — including those on the scale of the OKC bombing. We have trained rigorously for the past three years to build a state-controlled US&R team. These teams can operate for 12-hour shifts and, when paired with the 138th Fighter Wing Fire Department in Tulsa, Oklahoma, provide 24-hour continual US&R operations.

In my 17 years of experience, I have found we are all here for the same reason, which is the desire to serve — to be there for the nation when we are called, for the state when tragedy strikes, and for each other, whatever may come. The answer to how we prevail, from emergencies to deployments, is stricken on the granite under that flag — TOGETHER.



SECURITY FORCES

CAPT. JOHNNY R. RIAZ

Security forces members are often called Defenders. I've found that I am most motivated and impassioned when I can "defend the Defenders."

I first joined the Air National Guard in 2000 as a maintainer. 9/11 happened, and we deployed overseas. For the first part of my deployment, I ended up being a security forces augmentee. This somewhat foreshadowed my later career when I became the first sergeant for the 137th Security Forces Squadron (SFS).

We deal with issues like low morale and suicide Air Force-wide; in the security forces career field, those demanding issues can be compounded.

Security forces has high deployment rates and taxing duty schedules that lead to retention challenges. Taking on the assignment of serving as their first sergeant was my first shot at doing something to help.

I had specific instances in my career as a young enlisted Airman where senior leaders invested in me by standing up for me, while challenging me to hold myself to a higher standard. As a first sergeant, I was able to pay that back and experience what it felt like to take care of people who needed an advocate. For me, there were no better recipients of that on this base than our security forces Airmen.

That space between how complex the career field can be and what people think the job is can be expansive — it's easy to miss the depth of what the squadron does. We weave air base ground defense, law enforcement, and combat arms together in a way that produces a safe place to work for all at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base. We find ourselves working around the clock to complete a mission most know little about. That can take its toll on our members, not to mention the nature of their work means they're constantly fighting the enemy within. Yet, because of those challenges, our SFS members develop incredible resiliency, which can make a huge difference when it comes to being thrown into strange and stressful situations for long periods of time.

In the 2013 Moore tornado, that ability came to the forefront. While in SFS, an opportunity to commission presented itself, so I applied and was selected at the end of my three-year tour as first sergeant. I had just come back from my officer training — hadn't been back for more than 30 days — when the tornado hit. It was eye-opening to see the resilience those Airmen had and how it could be applied in such a demanding capacity. I learned so much from our senior noncommissioned officers being in the cadre as a new officer during that disaster response. Their wisdom and character made me that much more determined to serve our Defenders.

During my career, I've had opportunities to work with aspiring leaders, which has taught me one important thing. You may want to be a leader, but it's hard to find fulfillment in leading if you don't know why you're taking on the burden. You have to find your why. It can't be leadership for leadership's sake.

For me, it was that void between perception and truth of our Defenders' mission and how it impacted our Airmen. Impacting that gap positively is the why that drew me from my initial enlisted career path into being an officer.



MEDICAL GROUP

CAPT. SARA M. WILLHIGHT

My earliest remembered experience with first responders happened when my dad was burned in an accident when I was five years old. After my mom had put out the flames engulfing my dad, she called 911. My dad walked around in shock as my little brothers and I screamed and cried. It is a memory seared into my mind — that in a second, everything can change. The next memory I have about that night is the firefighter squatting down to meet my eyes and telling me that my brothers and I were going to be alright. Amid the fear and chaos, there was a moment of refuge as the firefighter's quiet calmness permeated my anxiety. My dad would go on to be hospitalized for over 11 weeks in intensive care and endure dozens of skin graft surgeries. He was expected to die, but somehow survived. Thanks to my mom's quick thinking and the first responders who helped my dad, he's alive and well today.

After the accident, I wanted to be a burn unit nurse for years. Those kind and dedicated nurses helped pull my dad from the brink. Little did I know of the intense, painful treatments burn victims endure. We had close relationships with one of the burn unit nurses for several years ... I still remember her name and riding horses at her ranch. I didn't realize it as a child, but now as an adult, I see how deeply the bonds run between accident victims and the first responders and medical staff who care for them. As I grew up, I began to understand the heavy emotional toll intensive care nurses bear. I honestly didn't think I had it in me to see people suffer through burn recovery — or worse, to see people die from their wounds. I loved being a part of medicine, but I knew I couldn't do it as a nurse or first responder. How do these men and women run toward disaster and know what to do?

The drive to run toward danger is highly concentrated in the military environment. Each of us has the calling, training and conditioning to respond to crisis when many others panic. Whether it is pulling over to help with an automobile accident or administering the Heimlich maneuver to a choking child, we all have the skillset to respond to an emergency. I love being a part of ensuring our medical Airmen are ready to deploy and clearing the way for our first responder heroes to do what they do best — run toward danger to help someone in crisis.

As a medical administration officer, my job is to ensure my fellow 137th Special Operations Medical Group (SOMDG) Guardsmen have the resources and training required to be ready anytime, anyplace. Our medical providers, nurses, and medical technicians are also dual-hatted firefighters, police officers, and paramedics — Guardsmen who not only serve the community in their daily lives, but also in domestic and contingency operations. Many SOMDG Guardsmen served in response efforts for Hurricane Katrina and Harvey. Several have also served in multiple deployments to U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command and U.S. Southern Command to work in deployed hospitals or patient evacuation missions.

When I think back on that scared little girl, I am humbled to have the opportunity to serve with first responders like the ones who helped my dad. I am grateful for the burn unit doctors, nurses and therapists who saw my dad through the seemingly endless days of his burn recovery. But above all, I am especially thankful to share the honor of serving our communities, Oklahoma and the U.S. with my fellow 137th Guardsmen who raise their hand to help those who need it most.



EMERGENCY MGMT.

MASTER SGT. MICAH R. JARRETT

April 19, 1995: I'm sitting in my parents' house at the dining room table completing my school assignments. Suddenly, I hear a boom and the sliding glass door leading to our back porch shakes dramatically. I look at my dad and ask him what happened. He says he doesn't know, and he doesn't appear immediately worried so I'm not either.

My dad listens to AM radio every day, but today my brother and I can tell something is different because the volume is low enough that we can't hear it.

Later, my Mom gets home for the day, and they tell us what happened. I'm so young that it doesn't really make much sense to me, but I can tell that it's a big deal ...

Little did I know those events would not only shape our world today, but also some of the choices I have made in my life. Seeing the multitude of volunteers, responders, and state and local agencies involved in the response and recovery effort made me wonder, even at a young age, how it all worked together.

During that same time period, I would frequently hear the droning of a C-130 Hercules overhead while playing in the backyard, and I'd look up in fascination. I had always loved military aircraft and would read books and memorize their names and appearances. My first introduction to Will Rogers Air National Guard Base was at Aerospace America in the late '90s. I was able to interact with aircraft firsthand, which only furthered my fascination with these flying machines. I learned that the C-130s I so often observed were stationed at the (then) 137th Airlift Wing — only a 20-minute drive from my childhood home.

Fast-forward 15 years to when I was 26, trying to complete a college degree and curious about the military and where I might fit in. A family friend explained the tuition benefits and wide range of career options and suggested I speak with a recruiter.

I never had clear intentions of joining the military (though I was curious with my dad's background in the U.S. Navy) and definitely not of becoming an emergency manager. I sat down for a job brief with Senior Master Sgt. David Perez in December 2008, and his description of the career field and my longtime curiosity about disaster response collided. I was soon off to bootcamp and technical school.

Through my career and education, I have become familiar with the Incident Command System and how it functions so well during times of crisis and chaos. I've learned how emergency managers can aid others by connecting people and resources and ensuring that available information gets disseminated as widely as possible. I've seen how creating relationships with other local agencies is an important part of being ready before bad things ever happen.

Now, our flight takes every opportunity to integrate with other agencies so that we have established relationships in the event we are recalled to help the community as Citizen Airmen. Last April, we integrated with the Oklahoma City Police Department, Oklahoma Highway Patrol, and the Oklahoma Army National Guard's 163rd Civil Support Team to provide threat monitoring for the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon. Opportunities like this make me feel I have come full circle — from being affected as a child by such a horrible tragedy to supporting and protecting our community at ground zero almost 25 years later.

REMEMBERING THE

OKC BOMBING

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER

Story by: Retired Col. Douglas D. Hayworth

It was a beautiful spring Wednesday morning on April 19, 1995, and most Oklahoma citizens were starting their day. At the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City, customers were beginning to arrive at the credit union and social security office, parents were dropping their children off at the day care, and U.S. Army and Marine Corps recruiters were preparing to receive new recruits. On the upper floors, staff of the Secret Service; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; U.S. Customs and Border Protection; and the Drug Enforcement Agency were in their offices. There was no indication that this would be a day like no other — that Oklahoma City emergency personnel and the Oklahoma Army and Air National Guard would be called to respond to what is still the deadliest domestic terrorist bombing in U.S. history.

Shortly before 9:00 a.m., a former Army soldier, Timothy McVeigh, parked a Ryder rental truck in front of the north side entrance to the Murrah Federal Building, ignited a fuse, got out, locked the door and walked a short distance to his getaway car. The truck contained a deadly mixture of agricultural fertilizer, diesel fuel, and nitromethane. At 9:02 a.m., the deadly mixture exploded with a blast equivalent to over 5,000 pounds of TNT. The blast destroyed a third of the building, pancaking nine floors of concrete and debris around a thirty-foot wide, eight-foot deep crater and causing severe damage to several other buildings located nearby. The explosion was reported to be felt and heard as far as 50 miles away. Seismometers recorded the concussion as magnitude 3.0. As a result, 168 people were killed — including 19 children — and hundreds were injured.



Tech. Sgt. Weldon Nesbitt, from the 137th Civil Engineering Squadron, looks over his shoulder as other emergency rescue personnel in the background dig through collapsed sections of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. A bomb was detonated the morning of April 19, 1995, in front of the building, and many personnel from offices around Will Rogers Air National Guard Base were activated to help in the response.

In his office at the Oklahoma State Capitol about a mile away, Gov. Frank Keating heard what he thought was a loud artillery shell. Upon learning there had been “some sort of a blast downtown,” one of his first commands was “Get Gen. Cortright on the phone, and get him in here immediately!” Maj. Gen. Stephen Cortright, a pilot at Tulsa Air National Guard Base in Tulsa, Oklahoma, had been the Adjutant General for Oklahoma only 17 days.

Master Sgt. David Perez, a 137th Airlift Wing firefighter, was at his home 12 miles from the Murrah building when the bomb went off. He at first thought his new garage door had fallen off its tracks or a sonic boom had occurred. Capt. Mark Hole was a traditional pilot working in the flight safety office in the main hangar when the bomb went off. He thought someone had banged the hangar doors together. Master Sgt. Rick Mutchler, a noncommissioned officer working in base supply, was at the Tinker Air Force Base (AFB) firing range when the bomb exploded. He heard the explosion but had no idea what had happened until the range instructor stopped their training. Capt. John Blair, commander for the 205th Engineering and Installation Squadron, was at the copy machine when the building shook and the windows rattled. Scott Irwin, a senior airman in the Security Police Squadron (SPS), was in class at the University of Oklahoma and, like most Oklahomans, was initially unaware of the events in Oklahoma City.

The Oklahoma National Guard was part of the response within minutes of the blast. Coincidentally, at 9:00 a.m. that day, Oklahoma Department of Civil Emergency Management personnel were conducting a planning meeting with state agency liaison officers — including the Oklahoma Military Department at the Oklahoma National Guard Military Academy. They immediately moved to the State Emergency Operations Center near the State Capitol. By 9:25 a.m., the center was fully operational and 24-hour operations began.

At Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Wing leadership were watching events unfold on local television news. Not knowing who had set off the bomb and with the possibility of a threat to the base, the decision was made to close the entrance gates. When the magnitude of the damage caused by the bombing became clear, it was obvious the (then) 137th Airlift Wing (AW) would be part of the recovery effort. As Blair and other Wing leaders arrived in Wing Commander Col. James McKinney’s office, the group created an inventory and assessment of the possible assets the Wing could provide and began preparations for their use.

At 9:45 a.m., Keating declared a state of emergency. At 4:00 p.m., President Bill Clinton signed Emergency Declaration FEMA-3115-EM-OK. These actions triggered the deployment of 11 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Task Forces from across the nation to Oklahoma City and set in motion a massive local, state, federal and military recovery effort.

As expected, 137th AW members immediately began to arrive at the base or call their units to offer help. Perez contacted 137th AW Fire Chief Les Tyree and, along with other 137th AW firemen, was sent to Tinker AFB to integrate with their fire department. They would operate two decontamination centers for personnel and equipment that exited the bomb site. Hole was sent to the bomb site immediately, where he began to work the logistics of moving equipment and supplies between the nearby First Christian Church — where he was a member — and the bomb site. The church had become the “Family Assistance Center” for families of the victims and was the central collection point for donated supplies.

Mutchler was sent to work in the command tent to coordinate Air National Guard personnel and equipment. After contacting his supervisors, Irwin and other 137th SPS personnel were immediately deployed to provide perimeter security for both the recovery site and the Family Assistance Center. 185th Operations Squadron crews were tasked to fly cargo missions to retrieve donated items from other states. To help with the criminal investigation portion of the recovery effort, the Wing’s C-130 Hercules were also tasked to utilize their on-board camera system to create a photographic mosaic of the damage caused by the explosion. Members of the Wing’s public affairs and audio-visual office worked long hours in the media center preparing material for Keating and briefings for national leaders. Identification of the victims was critical and especially stressful. Members of the 137th Medical Group utilized their skills and mobile dental x-ray equipment to assist in the process. Of the 168 victims, dental records were used to identify 123. As the recovery efforts stretched from hours to days to weeks, other Wing members were required to work outside of their normal jobs to augment security and search through the rubble during the last week of search and recovery. Before the recovery operation ended, nearly 300 Wing members were directly involved in the effort along with over 20 Air Guard family members.

At five minutes past midnight, May 5, 1995, the Oklahoma City Fire Department officially halted all recovery operations at the site. It was believed three bodies remained in the rubble, but due to their perceived location, the safety factor was too great to pursue their recovery until after the implosion of the building. Rescue and recovery workers gathered at the site for a memorial service.

At 7:02 a.m., May 23, 1995, the remains of the Alfred P. Murrah Building were imploded. In the next few days, the bodies of the three remaining victims were located, precisely where they were believed to be.

According to the Oklahoma Department of Civil Emergency Management, the events in April and May in Oklahoma City “illustrated the very best and the very worst mankind has to offer.”

The city, county, state and federal response procedures developed in this effort would become a model for the future. The domestic response system for military and civilian forces currently being taught at U.S. Northern Command had its beginning in this incident. FEMA US&R Task Force members commented regularly that they had never been treated so well before, and that the care and compassion they received while in Oklahoma had become the standard — the “Oklahoma Standard.”

Simply defined, the “Oklahoma Standard” represents the greatest asset our state offers — our people. A0



Firefighters dig through collapsed sections of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. A bomb was detonated the morning of April 19, 1995, in front of the building. Rescue crews constantly worked to dig through the rubble for victims and survivors, finding the last survivor late in the day on April 21, 1995. There were 168 people killed in the bombing and over 600 injured.



Firefighters line up to have the outside of their protective gear washed off before they leave the site of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. There were two decontamination sites run by fire personnel from Tinker Air Force Base and Will Rogers Air National Guard Base that allowed emergency rescue personnel to wash off any contaminants picked up while looking for casualties after a bomb was detonated the morning of April 19, 1995, in front of the building.

Q&A

PERSONAL STORIES OF GUARDSMEN IN THE COMMUNITY

Interview: Staff Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire



LT. COL. MARK D. HOLE

HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT THE BOMBING?

I was working in the Wing safety office. Initially, the hangar building shook, and we weren't sure what exactly had happened. But within just a few minutes, someone came down the hall and told us that there had been an explosion downtown. Everybody went outside to see if they could see it, and you could see smoke. So it was a lot of just "I wonder what happened?" Then the word went out: If anybody wanted to volunteer, they gave us instructions on what to do. I had been worried because my wife was supposed to have been downtown at the time, and I couldn't get ahold of her. When I finally made contact with her and she was okay, I told her that I was going to volunteer to help.

WHAT DID YOU DO AS A VOLUNTEER?

So, I was a captain at the time, and I had pilot experience. There was no flying at the time, so I didn't do anything that was directly related to my military job. I ended up being able to go to where some of the rescue workers were staging just outside of the bomb site. I at least had enough experience with how the logistical things work in the military to know who to call, whether it be a military entity or somebody out in the civilian world. I would get ahold of different contacts to figure out where we could get those things they were asking for, then worked out how to get those delivered to the site and to the people who were asking for them, so that they could distribute where they needed it. A lot of the things they needed were boots and gloves. It was kind of chilly. So, you know, they needed masks, protective-type equipment. It was maybe a week or 10 days into the rescue effort when they'd finally gotten to the point where they basically found everybody that they thought they could find. Oklahoma had reached out to different states – very similar to what happens during tornadoes, the floods that we've had, hurricanes, things like that – and we had some pretty specific lists of things that they needed.

HOW DID YOU ALL GET VIDEO OFF OF THE C-130S FOR THE FBI?

The FBI needed some overhead video, and at the time, we

had cameras that we had mounted on the aircraft that we typically used for a drug interdiction mission. One of our crews actually went and mapped out with that camera overhead so that the FBI, with all of their collection of evidence, could grid out where all those things were. The Nevada Air Guard had these cameras for their RF-4, and when they got rid of their RF-4s, these cameras were available. We had gotten the idea that we could use those cameras – build a rack for them that would fit in the back of the 130. You could do all kinds of different things with those cameras to support the Drug Enforcement Agency trying to find where people were growing illegal drugs, but you could also use that camera to fly over a target area and take pictures of the ground.

The FBI was collecting all of the evidence pieces – had vehicles and just thousands and thousands of pieces of evidence – and they needed a way to grid where they found those pieces. We contacted them, told them we had this capability, and we worked it out with them to do that at the bomb site so that they could grid out where they'd found all these pieces of evidence.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU REMEMBER MOST ABOUT THAT TIME?

After the initial response, there was still some thought that there might be a continuing threat for additional bombs. People started zoning off a lot like we do in the military. Within a couple of days, they had really restricted who could be close to the site. I was able to get access to everything except the actual bomb site, and I remember having to go over to a building close to the YMCA that was downtown and get a special badge. That allowed me to have that kind of access to the FBI. It started raining – I mean, it just RAINED – and it was a muddy mess. They said "We need bigger buildings so that we can, basically, make a garage to put all these cars through and inspect for evidence." I was able to arrange to get those down there. So it worked out really well, to just have been in the military and be able to have that kind of clearance to get in and get right to those people. I was able to coordinate with all these different agencies to get exactly what they needed, or at least get them in touch with somebody that I knew could get them what they needed. We

did that work so they could try to figure out what happened.

LOOKING BACK, WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST IMPRESSION OF THE BASE'S RESPONSE TO THE BOMBING?

That was a tough day for all of Oklahoma, and our nation, and it still, obviously, affects me. But it makes me really proud that even then, and always since then, this unit has always stepped up to help our state and help our fellow Oklahomans.

That's one of the unique things about any Guard unit, whether it's an Army Guard unit or an Air Guard unit ... we have a dual role. For me, as a born-and-raised Oklahoman, our state role, I think, is just as important ... as our federal role. The unit here, Will Rogers, has never been reluctant to respond. I think that's one of the things that makes every state Guard unit very unique. I would imagine that every other state is going to be willing to respond to their community just like we do.

I'm really proud of everyone who was involved, and I'm proud that we continue to do that over and over again – with natural disasters, hurricane relief, and hay drops that we did for the big snowstorm in New Mexico. It is the "Oklahoma Standard," and I think that's why not just myself, but other members of this unit, are really proud to be able to respond to this and any other tasking that we're given. It's why we chose to serve in the military.

FIRE PROTECTION

PROTECTING OUR ASSETS FROM FIRES AND DISASTERS

Story and Photography: **Staff Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire**

A Will Rogers World Airport firefighter prepares to move a patient simulator (used to act as a victim trapped in a fire) out of a smoke-filled room during a Vent-Enter-Isolate-Search (VEIS) operations class held by the 137th Special Operations Fire Emergency Services fire department on May 19, 2020, at the Will Rogers Air National Guard Base Fire Station in Oklahoma City. Firefighters use VEIS when they enter a burning structure through a window: vent by breaking the window, enter the room through the broken window, isolate the room from the rest of the building by closing doors and other points of entry, and search the room for the victim.

Firefighters in the military – including those with the 137th Special Operations Wing (137th SOW) Fire Emergency Services – receive specialty training to meet Department of Defense response standards and certifications that firefighters who are not in the military cannot get. For Air Force firefighters, the variety of aircraft they respond to presents unique challenges in rescuing the most valuable assets on those aircraft: the people.

At Will Rogers World Airport, these include the 137th's own MC-12Ws; T-1 Jayhawks, T-38 Talons, and T-6 Texans from Vance Air Force Base in Enid, Oklahoma; C-130 Hercules; KC-135 Stratotankers; aircraft from Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City, and many other aircraft in transit from around the U.S. They might have to respond to crashes, fires and rescues while navigating each different airframe's explosive hazards, such as chaffs and flares or ejection seats.

"We can replace a plane," said Sean Kinner, installation fire chief at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base (WRANGB). "We want to try to save as many lives as possible. The drive for our employees, our firefighters, our station chiefs, our assistant chiefs is much higher as a result of knowing that we need to be an expert every time we show up."

The arrival of the 137th SOW's primary aircraft, the MC-12W, meant changes on WRANGB, including the need for a fully and constantly staffed department to meet minimum staffing requirements. Up to that point, the base did not have a full-time fire department, instead relying on the airport and Oklahoma City Fire Departments for help in the event of a fire.

But when the wheels of the new mission started turning, the 137th SOW couldn't start the fire department using

the National Guard Bureau (NGB) model. The base and the missions it supports required a fully-staffed department all day, every day; but, the standard NGB technician Title 32 slot only allowed those specially-trained military firefighters to work 40 hours a week. Firefighters did not have enough hours to constantly meet the minimum staffing requirements.

Luckily, they did not need to light a fire under any assets to demonstrate the need to think outside the model – the leadership of the wing, civil engineering squadron, and firehouse worked proactively to build one of the newest Title 5 fire departments in the Air National Guard. This allows the firefighters to have a 72-hour shift rotation of five people and maintain a department that is staffed 24/7, ready to provide services to the base at any moment until backup arrives.

"We provide the primary emergency medical service to the installation," Kinner said. "We provide that bridge for the gap between the incident occurring and our mutual aid provider showing up from off site."

Aside from conducting emergency services and fire operations for the approximately 1,100 Airmen assigned to Will Rogers, the department also provides basic services like inspections for buildings and extinguishers. But the department is still growing to reach its maximum staffing, so they rely on mutual aid from departments at the airport and in Oklahoma City in the meantime.

The base and Will Rogers airport share runways, so firefighting together – when more numbers make a scene safer – and training together helps both departments excel at the specialized aircraft firefighting they both do.

Austin Gibbons became a Will Rogers airport firefighter after

getting his civilian fire training academy certification in 2016. During that time, he met the firefighters at WRANGB and decided to join the Guard as a firefighter and is currently an airman first class.

“I’d be able to get certifications that would take me 10 years to get as a civilian, so I joined,” he said. “Then the full-time jobs started ramping up to start the department. So after speaking with the fire chiefs about the experienced department I would be joining, I applied.”

He now works full-time with the WRANGB Fire Department. Nearly every fire emergency services Airman with the 137th is a civilian firefighter, or works full-time at WRANGB or another Air Force base.

“All of that knowledge and those unique ideas from around different cities, different states, are brought into that one unit to build one of the strongest fire departments that I’ve ever seen,” Gibbons said. “That’s my driving force to build this new fire department and try to get the full-time staff to continue that training with our everyday mission.”

However, that experienced crew is only on base for two days each month. Therefore, the airport and Air Force departments work and train together as part of their mutual aid partnership to make the rest of the month safer.

“It’s kind of like we do in our unit – taking knowledge from all these different departments and making that into one stronger unit,” said Gibbons. “We try to work together so that one day, if something happens, we’re able to work cohesively.”

With shared runways and a shared mission, coming to a mutual understanding of who is responsible for what before an incident is important when these men and women are pulling each other’s assets out of the fire.

“We are basically the rescue experts on military aircraft,” said Kinner. “With the airport department, when they show up on scene they’ll be the first ones to put out that first layer of foam around the aircraft and suppress that exterior fire. Then, our firefighters would enter the aircraft for initial suppression operations or to conduct rescue operations simultaneously.”

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Aircraft Rescue

and Fire Fighting model relies on the aircrew and passengers leaving the aircraft under their own power while the department controls the fire from the outside, ensuring the escape path is continually cleared and protected. DoD standards require Air Force firefighters to go in to pull out personnel. That does not mean airport fire departments would not go into an aircraft to rescue someone – it is just not a required part of their training. Luckily with this airport and base, they are able to train together for that kind of response.

“We haven’t had an incident where we’ve had to do that with them since I’ve been here, but I would expect that joint response would occur,” said Kinner. “They would enable us and help us to do that for even civilian aircraft.”

Rule number one in an emergency is don’t become victim number two, so pooling that knowledge when responding to military or civilian assets helps ensure they won’t make an asset out of themselves.

“We can see that training difference when we do joint exercises and joint training evolutions, learning the shortcuts that we’ve learned doing military-specific asset responses that convert to general aviation,” said Kinner. “The product that travelers at the airport are getting – including our own people – is much better as a result of that joint endeavor.”

This training helps in response to other mutual aid situations as well. From potential grass wildfires to fires in hangars and other structures, the departments cover the airport, the FAA’s Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center, and the base. Those three areas total up to 9,317 acres of land. There are a lot of assets on the line with over 150 buildings (not including airport structures) in that area.

“The actual enormous property that Will Rogers encompasses is better day-to-day as we respond with the civilian provider,” said Kinner. “The passengers that land here are getting a better service, and they don’t even know that it’s occurring.”

As the WRANGB Fire Department continues to grow, they will be better able to help respond to emergencies involving the military and help the airport supplement its response. Whether you are on base or flying through the airport, they’ll be trained and ready to save your assets. **AO**



Firefighters with the 137th Special Operations Wing Fire Emergency Services, Oklahoma City, and the 138th Fighter Wing Fire Department, Tulsa, Oklahoma, simulate applying a foam blanket to extinguish a floating fuel fire during deployment readiness training at March Air Reserve Base in Riverside County, California, June 28, 2018. The 137th Special Operations Civil Engineering Squadron members train at a regional training site every three years as a part of this deployment readiness training.



Justin Shepherd, a station chief for the 137th Special Operations Fire Emergency Services, blindly works his way through a tangle of wires in a confined space trainer May 14, 2020, at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City. Firefighters dress in their full gear, which can weigh over 70 pounds, as well as blindfold themselves when going through this to simulate being trapped under a wall or ceiling that has collapsed during a fire.

Q&A

PERSONAL STORIES OF GUARDSMEN IN THE COMMUNITY

Interview: **Staff Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire**



SENIOR MASTER SGT. DAVID E. PEREZ

WHAT IS IT LIKE BEING A FIREFIGHTER ON A MILITARY BASE?

The fire department and security forces are first responders for the installations primarily. A lot of our day is taken up with administrative work and training and doing building inspections. Beyond that, we have mutual aid agreements with Oklahoma City, the airport, some surrounding communities, and they could call upon us to act in that first responder role.

HOW DOES MUTUAL AID WORK WITH THE OKLAHOMA CITY FIRE DEPARTMENT AND WILL ROGERS WORLD AIRPORT FIRE DEPARTMENT?

They have to request the resources from Will Rogers Air Guard Base to respond. And once they do make that request, we go through a series of checklists: Can we go? Do we have coverage? Who needs to go? And then we respond. So, it's not in the first minute, but it's fairly quick.

HOW LONG HAS THE BASE HAD A MUTUAL AID AGREEMENT WITH OKLAHOMA CITY?

We've had a mutual aid agreement with Oklahoma City since before I came to the unit, which was back in January of '86. As soon as I started at the fire department, that was always a big thing we trained on — the fact that we had a mutual aid agreement and could be called to go outside the fence of Will Rogers and respond with Oklahoma City.

IS THERE EVER AN ISSUE WORKING WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS IN AN OUTSIDE EMERGENCY OR IN A DISASTER?

In regard to response as mutual aid, we'll just fit right into their Incident Command System (ICS). We're trained to the same ICS they have, so it's quite easy to plug-and-play. Where we might have a little bit of a problem is waiting for the word to actually respond. Again, our job is primarily on

base, so in order for us to go off base, we need to make sure that we have coverage — that there isn't flying going on — those kinds of things. There are some things that we have to check off before we go, “OK. Now let's respond outside the base.”

SPEAKING OF DISASTERS, WHAT WAS IT LIKE FOR YOU WITH THE OKC BOMBING WHILE YOU WERE A FIREFIGHTER ON BASE?

At the time, I happened to be off duty, and I was sitting at my house when the bomb went off. Initially, I thought that the new garage doors that I had put up the day before had fallen in. They were fine. And then I thought, what could create such a boom? And I thought, well, maybe a sonic blast from an airplane flying overhead. So, I ran outside to see if I could see a contrail. About that time, I was getting a phone call from my wife. She worked about seven blocks to the north of the Murrah Building, and she said, “turn on the TV, something's happened downtown.” I turned on the TV, and that's when the first aerial pictures started to show up.

I immediately called back to the fire station, spoke with the fire chief, asked him if we were being recalled to duty or what the status was. I was told to standby. After that, I understood they were asking for help down at the site, and at the time I was an EMT. So, I went down to see what I could do and checked on my wife to see if she was okay. And then I reported over to St. Anthony's hospital. That's where most of the injured were going. It was mass chaos. But they seemed to have things well in hand. There was plenty of medical personnel, so I went back home.

But later on, Tinker asked for us to go backfill. There were firefighters who were already responding down to the Murrah Building. Once we got to Tinker's Fire Department, then they were like, “Well, we can just plug and play these guys in as well.” And so collectively, we went down as a response from Tinker Fire Department. But there were some nights that I

didn't go down to the bombing. I stayed at the station and responded to fire calls on Tinker. So, it was just a matter of what they needed us to do.

HOW HAS DISASTER RESPONSE CHANGED SINCE THAT TIME?

Well, I would say the firehouse response in a disaster now is going to be a little different than when I was in the fire department. With Oklahoma City, they understand more what our capabilities are with emergency management.

HOW HAS THE DEPARTMENT CHANGED SINCE THAT TIME?

Around 2016 is when we started standing up another full-time department. Really and truly, about the last two years is when it has really come together. As an emergency manager for the installation, I've seen a lot of growth in the department. We've had a lot of good guys come through that have changed the direction of the department so that municipalities in the local area understand that we can respond just as effectively as they can.

DEFENSOR FORTIS

The Strong Defender

Story: Tech. Sgt. Kasey M. Phipps

Translated from Latin, “**DEFENSOR FORTIS**” — the U.S. Air Force Security Forces’ motto that can found on their distinctive beret flash — literally means “**STRONG DEFENDER.**”

Pictured most often at the front gates of bases or patrolling in police vehicles, Defenders not only act as military law enforcement, but also as the Air Force’s primary ground-protection force — the brave and constant defenders of the nation’s servicemen and women.

Using tactics and strategies predating the U.S. Air Force as well as the equipment and weapons built for tomorrow’s fights, the men and women of the 137th Special Operations Security Forces Squadron (137th SOSFS) protect the 137th Special Operations Wing’s (137th SOW) force and its mission.

Their jobs are essential and varied, including antiterrorism, installation security, resource security, law enforcement and investigations, armament and equipment training, pass and registration, information security, and combat arms training and maintenance (CATM) activities.

The Air Force antiterrorism (AT) program is at the helm of these and seeks to deter or blunt acts of terrorism against the force by giving guidance on threat information, creating awareness, allocating funds and personnel, and implementing defense measures. The U.S. position on terrorism, both foreign and domestic, is unequivocal: firmly oppose terrorism in all of its forms.

Every Defender’s daily activity is conducted based on this principle and documented in a blotter.

DAY OF A DEFENDER

0800 BLOTTER OPENED
LOCATION: BDOC, BLDG 1000, RM 100

Nine Airmen begin their shifts as part of flight operations.

“Flight operations involve controlling access to the installation, law enforcement and resource protection,” explained Tech. Sgt. Kyle Drake, 137th SOSFS flight sergeant of Charlie Flight. “They’re responsible for ensuring that the base, personnel and assets are protected.”

These Airmen make up one of three flights — Alpha, Bravo and Charlie. Each of these flights corresponds with a shift — day, night and swing. They are each assigned to one of the nine posts, or patrols, during “arm up”, where they receive updates and then relieve the Airmen on their posts from the previous shift.

0805 RANDOM AT MEASURE
LOCATION: BLDG 5000, ENTRY ACCESS POINT
SUMMARY: SHOW OF FORCE. NO SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY REPORTED.

The mission of the AT program is to mitigate risk to Will Rogers Air National Guard Base (WRANGB) and its personnel, mission and assets by reducing vulnerabilities and overcoming threats.

“The AT mission is important because the base needs personnel and assets to bring about the 137th SOW mission,” said Tech. Sgt. Israel Poire, 137th SOSFS antiterrorism program manager. “If people are preoccupied with defending themselves and their assets during attack, their ability to complete their respective unit’s missions are greatly impaired. If personnel and/or assets are harmed, they’re no longer as useful to the mission as they would have been prior to attack.”

0823 RANDOM AT MEASURE
LOCATION: INTERIOR OF WRANGB
SUMMARY: INTERIOR MOBILE PATROL OF WRANGB

As part of the AT program, the installation conducts a number of random antiterrorism measures (RAMs) around the base.

“There is a minimum number that we’re required to complete,” said Poire. “We can, and almost always do, exceed what’s required by Air Force instruction and local

Airman 1st Class Harley Jones, a security forces journeyman assigned to the 137th Special Operations Security Forces Squadron, checks the perimeter around an ammunition storage area at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, May 28, 2020. Security forces personnel are charged with ensuring the safety of the base, weapons, property and personnel.

Photograph: Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux

policy. This means that the type, number, frequency, location and longevity of these measures are truly random. Security forces participate in flight-level, AT-related exercises nearly every shift, and the 137th SOW conducts a minimum of two to three wing-level AT exercises every year.”

These RAMs can be as reaching as driving the perimeter of the more than 130-acre base, as concentrated as searching the compartments of a car or as targeted as patrolling a specific access point.

0955 TRAFFIC STOP
LOCATION: INTERSECTION OF SW 57TH AND AIR GUARD DR.
REASON: SPEEDING
DISPOSITION: MOTORIST WAS CITED AND RELEASED ON OWN RECOGNIZANCE

“We try not to post our Airmen at the same post every day,” explained Drake. “To avoid complacency, we have our different posts that we work each day here. We have the front gate, we have patrols, we have the flight line, and we have a flight chief. When we're not responding to calls, checking IDs, searching delivery trucks, conducting building checks and responding to alarms, we’re constantly mentoring each other and training each other.”

Each of the three flights has an appointed training representative who, in between operations, plans scenarios in order to keep Airmen qualified at each patrol position.

“We are constantly patrolling and remaining vigilant on flight operations,” said Drake. “We’re constantly training our troops and increasing their skills, knowledge and performance.”

1030 SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY REPORT
LOCATION: 50 METERS NORTH OF BLDG 1049
SUMMARY: SUSPICIOUS PERSON REPORTED NEAR BUILDING. SUBJECT INTERVIEWED AND RELEASED ON OWN RECOGNIZANCE
NOTIFICATIONS: S2I, S3O, AFOSI

The AT program is also responsible for ensuring everyone, base-wide, stays current on their AT training. This is especially important for incidents — like unidentified packages or suspicious persons — that depend on base personnel to be an active part of the installation’s protection.

Additionally from these, the program develops AT and integrated defense plans for the installation and testing the reality of those plans; assessing and managing the risks and vulnerabilities of the installation; advising the commander on all antiterrorism, force protection, and integrated defense matters; and conducting comprehensive program reviews. Because of the breadth of this program, AT plans and guidance can be found at every level of operations — from the program to base personnel to the Airman on flight operations.

“We do a different job every day, depending on where you're at, what you're doing,” continued Drake. “We're responsible for the base personnel and its assets 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We have members patrolling the base, answering the phones, controlling entry at the gate and ensuring all the assets in our aircraft are in good hands.”

1120 RANDOM AT MEASURES
LOCATION: EXTERIOR OF WRANGB

SUMMARY: MOBILE PATROL OF WRANGB EXTERIOR AND ADJACENT AREAS. NO SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY OR SECURITY CONCERNS REPORTED.

Before, during and after an incident, Airmen on patrol update BDOC.

The base defense operations center, or BDOC, is continuously manned and another one of the nine patrols. With “operations center” in the title, it looks like just that — a secured area with camera feeds and a radio-docking-station that allows them to be the center of flight operations.

The Airman there, receives reports from base personnel and flight operations and then uses that information to appropriately dispatch and respond to an incident. In certain incidents, they are also required to make a record of the situation and send notification to higher echelons, such as Security Force Investigations (S2I), the operations section (S3O), and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI).

“Most importantly, they have to be in control of the situation while prioritizing their decisions,” said Drake. “So they are basically the ones that are making the decisions of how we're going to react. They have to prioritize anything that comes up.”

1200 RANGE FIRING BEGINS
LOCATION: CATM RANGE

Another part of security forces is the Combat Arms Training and Maintenance (CATM) program, which is a wing program whose main mission is to ensure the base population stays current on necessary shooting qualifications while also maintaining those weapons for use in a moment’s notice, especially for deployments.

The CATM office is composed of 15 people — three full time personnel and 12 traditional Guardsmen — and they are responsible for the weapons training of the approximately 1,100 personnel on base.

“We’re responsible for preventing lapses in qualifications, to eliminate downtime, and ensure a fully-capable force,” said Senior Airman Braden Bussey, a 137th SOSFS Combat Arms instructor.

CATM members work with the training managers of each unit to schedule classes and qualifications. For some career fields, like the 137th SOSFS and the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron, each member is required to maintain up to 11 different weapon qualifications; and some qualifications can take the team up to 12 hours.

Before arriving at the range, the section coordinates scheduling, transportation, ammunition and documentation.

“They show up, and we take care of the rest,” said Bussey.

1341 POST CHECKS
LOCATION: ALL POSTS AND PATROLS AT WRANGB
SUMMARY: ALL POSTS REPORTED AS SECURE AND IN ORDER.

1400 RANDOM INSTALLATION ENTRY/EXIT VEHICLE CHECKS
LOCATION: BLDG 5000, INSTALLATION ACCESS CONTROL POINT
SCOPE: CHECK ALL INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR VEHICLE

AREAS AND COMPARTMENTS
SUMMARY: NO SUSPICIOUS ITEMS OR ACTIVITY WERE REPORTED.

1422 PERIMETER CHECK
LOCATION: WRANGB PERIMETER
SUMMARY: PERIMETER AND ADJACENT AREAS WERE CHECKED FOR SIGNS OF TAMPERING, UNAUTHORIZED ENTRY, OR SUSPICIOUS ITEMS OR ACTIVITY. NO PROBLEMS REPORTED.

1439 CONTROLLED AREA CHECKS
LOCATION: CONTROLLED AREAS ON WRANGB
SUMMARY: ALL CONTROLLED AREAS AND NEARBY AREAS ON WRANGB WERE CHECKED FOR SUSPICIOUS ITEMS AND/OR ACTIVITY. NO PROBLEMS WERE REPORTED.

“In security forces, our job is to go in and not just protect the resources, but also protect the areas of the base itself,” said Tech. Sgt. Arelia Rocker, 137th SOSFS Resource Protection Program manager and Installation Security Section (ISS) noncommissioned officer.

Oversight of the controlled area program — which includes all controlled areas on base — falls on the 137th SOSFS Resource Protection Program. Controlled areas at WRANGB include the flight line, command post, SIPRnet rooms, and three weapons vaults on base.

To do this, the installation must adhere to strict guidelines. As both the program manager and ISS noncommissioned officer, Rocker has oversight over the resource protection program, which includes compliance surveys, assisting individual controlled area monitors and program readiness, as well as the responsibility of compiling guidelines from higher headquarters and applying it to the specific needs of the 137th SOW and its missions.

Considerations for those plans depend on details like the number and location of flight line entrances, number and type of aircraft, types of missions, number of controlled areas and so forth.

The ISS also conducts compliance checks and gathers the blotters from flight operations, looking for responses such as an activated pop-up barrier, alarms, and activity reports in order to better understand the changing security landscape of WRANGB.

“We really start dealing with data analysis,” explained Rocker. “We're basically compiling information and looking for anything that shows a security risk, a violation or something like that. We can then adjust to serve the mission better.”

1510 ALARM RESPONSE
LOCATION: BLDG 1046
SUMMARY: FACILITIES WERE CHECKED FOR SECURITY AND SUSPICIOUS ITEMS AND/OR ACTIVITY. NO PROBLEMS WERE REPORTED.

The ISS program also identifies assets on base that meet specific criteria for certain levels of protection, which can include the presence of guards, alarms, panic buttons or motion sensors. Systems like this — such as intrusion detection, door sensors and motion detection — fall under the Electronic Security Systems (ESS) section.

“We have a term called ‘defense in-depth,’” said Tech. Sgt. Phillip Fox, ESS noncommissioned officer. “These systems

add to that and act as a force multiplier as well. Having the electronic security system allows us to not have a body posted at a specific area, which allows us to keep as many people out on the road as possible without having to post somebody specifically at each individual building.”

The more than 70 pieces of security equipment strategically placed throughout WRANGB contribute to “defense in-depth,” which is based on increasing protection by creating layers of security. Any security measure is included in this: from fences on the perimeter of the base, gate guards and active patrols, to the thickness of walls and doors of the buildings.

These systems are then monitored by Defenders in BDOC, who will facilitate a response if one is activated. However, should any one of these pieces be found to malfunction or falsely activate, ESS is responsible for troubleshooting the system or calling technicians to order a timely repair.

“It's important to the base mission because without certain assets being protected the mission can’t continue — especially at our base where we have a very specific mission set,” explained Fox. “Some of those assets have to be protected. It's not just the aircraft, right? It's equipment that goes on the aircraft, it's the equipment used inside certain buildings, and then it's the personnel themselves with the knowledge on how to operate that equipment.”

1522 RANDOM AT MEASURE
LOCATION: NORTHWEST PERIMETER OF WRANGB
SUMMARY: COUNTER-SURVEILLANCE CONDUCTED. NO SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY OR IMMEDIATE SECURITY CONCERNS WERE REPORTED.

1535 GUARD MOUNT
LOCATION: GUARD MOUNT ROOM, BLDG 1000, RM 101
SUMMARY: ALL PERTINENT PASS-ON INFORMATION BRIEFED. REPORTING MEMBERS WERE DEEMED FIT AND READY FOR DUTY.

“I think most people enjoy this career field,” reflected Drake. “We all like each other, and we’re family. You know when we're on 12-hour shifts, we spend a lot more time here than we even get to spend at home. It's really about why we’re here in the first place. A lot of our training is about looking out and having each other's back. So, when it comes to any situation we're in, we've got to make sure the person next to us can cover us and we can cover them.”

The Defenders in Air Force Security Forces act as the protective barrier between an installation's mission and the threats around the corner.

“The [137th SOSFS] is powered by camaraderie, teamwork, and the support we have from our senior leadership,” concluded Drake. “We’re different than most squadrons because we have so many people who are always working together toward a common goal — protection of our resources and protection of our people. Without that, we have no mission.”

1600 BLOTTER CLOSED
LOCATION: BDOC, BLDG 1000, RM 101 A0

Q&A

PERSONAL STORIES OF GUARDSMEN IN THE COMMUNITY

Interview: **Staff Sgt. Brigitte A. Waltermire**



SENIOR MASTER SGT. GARY R. HOPCUS

WHY DID YOU JOIN THE GUARD?

So, 1998 is when I joined the Air Force Reserves and started off at the 507th with supply. Then once 9/11 hit, I ended up wanting to do something to help out with all the deployments. The supply unit wasn't deploying, so I decided to switch over to security forces, to the Air National Guard. Plus, on top of that, there were more educational benefits compared to the Reserves – which was also another incentive for me to jump over to the Guard. It also kind of helped tailor what I wanted to do on the civilian side, which was to become a police officer. It was definitely a stepping stone to help that trajectory for me to use my military experiences to apply to something on the civilian side.

ARE YOU ABLE TO TRANSITION BETWEEN YOUR CIVILIAN AND MILITARY ROLES EASILY IN THAT CASE?

They both complement each other. I've kind of taken my Guard stage and learned from the mistakes and the triumphs that I've had over my military career, and I've applied it to my civilian career. I've done the same thing likewise for my civilian career, and I've applied it to my military career.

WHAT DID YOU START OUT DOING IN SECURITY FORCES COMPARED TO WHAT YOU DO NOW?

I've been in security forces for almost 20 years now. I started off as basically just a person who was working entry control. I also worked patrol at the base, worked the flight line, and just providing security for the installation. For the most part, in my position as a superintendent, I'm kind of overseeing everything on the traditional side of things: making sure that they're getting all their readiness tasks taken care of, all the duty position tasks so that they can go out there and they can work the post.

WHAT DO YOU WORK TO INSTILL IN YOUR AIRMEN AS A LEADER?

What we try to ingrain in the young troops is always be prepared. And I mean no situation or day is going to be routine by any means. So, they have to be prepared to react

to whatever they come across – everything they come across. Complacency kills, especially when you get deployed. That's one of the things that we really emphasize – that you always have to remain vigilant. You always have to be able to react in a moment's notice because you never know when that moment's going to occur. So, yes, the day-to-day operations can seem mundane at times, but they have to be able to react appropriately when called upon.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST CHALLENGING TIME IN YOUR CAREER?

Probably in 2012 when I was deployed ... We had a lot of challenges going into the deployment due to the fact that the unit as a whole was down on manpower. We had basically scraped together enough people to go on this deployment tasking. And once we got there, it was one hurdle after another just trying to get new guys through the door, making sure they had everything that they needed to succeed and to make sure all of our administrative tasks were also being taken care of. For me as a squad leader, that was probably one of the most difficult tasks that I've had in my military career.

IS THERE A TIME IN YOUR CAREER YOU'RE THE PROUDEST OF?

Once we got back home from that 2012 deployment, we were still kind of down on manpower. So, once we got home, we were kind of beat up from that deployment, and then the tornado occurred on May 20, 2013 in Oklahoma City and Moore. Without any kind of hesitation whatsoever, we just had a whole group of people that had been deployed, or people that weren't deployed ... we all meshed together as one. We responded almost flawlessly with all the hurdles that we had in front of us to make sure we were helping out as much as we possibly could.

WAS THAT DIFFICULT TO CHANGE MODES FROM SECURITY FORCES ON A DEPLOYMENT AND ON A BASE TO THAT OF A DISASTER?

Well, in security forces, we're actually kind of tailored for

natural disaster responses. A lot of the things that that are needed in a natural disaster are going to be things like traffic control. There's going to be security for neighborhoods, businesses ... things like that that are definitely applicable to what the civilian law enforcement has to deal with. We integrate very well with not only other military units, but also with the local police departments. For security forces, that tornado response back in 2013 was just basically like setting up a bare-base operation doing our jobs like we were out at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE FOR YOU BEING A POLICE OFFICER AND GUARDSMAN RESPONDING TO THE TORNADO?

I kind of wore two hats during the whole ordeal. I'm a police officer in Norman so I went there initially as a police officer and helped out there. I got to see it from the civilian side first because they were responding there so I saw the devastation, and I knew there was a lot of help that was still needed. Once I got activated on the military side and started helping out, I knew exactly where we would most likely be plugged in just because some of the supervisors that were coordinating on the civilian side were friends of mine. When I initially got there, I helped coordinate with command post (the civilian command post that was established for the law enforcement side of things) and found out what they needed. They basically indicated that they needed security around the Plaza Towers Elementary School where all the kids perished during the tornado. Then once that was established, I ended up working over at the Joint Operations Command with the Army, putting in our stats and our numbers for how many personnel, pieces of equipment and vehicles that we had.

BIOENVIRONMENTAL

DEFENDING OUR HEALTH AND REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Story and Photography: **Tech. Sgt. Kasey M. Phipps**

Scrubs rush through emergency rooms alongside rolling gurneys. Lights flash over a starched collar as the back doors of a medical emergency vehicle slam behind it. A white coat swirls around a stool as its wearer delivers test results.

There are as many images of medical responders as there are experiences with health. For 137th Special Operations Wing (137th SOW) Guardsmen and other service members in the Air National Guard, their medical experiences on base are frequently that of uniforms ducking in and out of various rooms, attaining signatures and checking boxes.

This is often the preventive and monitoring side of medical — the side that keeps Guardsmen ready and in the fight, whatever fight may come their way.

Tucked in a room found in the 137th Special Operations Medical Group's (137th SOMDG) back hallway is a key part of the physical health of all 137th SOW Airmen. However, it goes largely under-the-radar despite its presence and expertise during operations, both on and off the installation.

The 137th Bioenvironmental Engineering (137th BE) office is composed of five members, two full-time and three drill status, whose mission is to provide worldwide operational health risk assessment expertise to optimize human performance, enhance commander decision-making, and provide health services support.

“Our office is kind of a jack-of-all-trades,” explained Tech. Sgt. Rebecca Keylon, a 137th BE technician. “We are knowledgeable on chemicals; radiation; respiratory protection; ventilation; noise; water; chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN); thermal stress; personal protective equipment (PPE); air sampling; and response.”

Breaking down their mission into three parts — risk assessment, enhancing commander decision-making and health services support — helps to build the picture of their significant, yet behind-the-scenes role in military operations.

Risk assessment, or more specifically operational health risk assessment, is just that — the operational side of health risk assessment.

Oklahoma Air National Guard Tech. Sgt. Rebecca Keylon, a bioenvironmental engineering technician with the 137th Bioenvironmental Engineering Office at the 137th Special Operations Wing in Oklahoma City, sprays a carefully measured amount of saccharine solution into a qualitative fit test hood during an N95 mask fit test, April 20, 2020, for an Oklahoma Army National Guardsman. Before conducting decontamination missions for long-term care facilities throughout the state, each Guardsman assigned to a decontamination team was issued N95 masks to protect both their health and the health of facility residents.



Oklahoma Army National Guard Sgt. Christina Burgess with the 63rd Combat Support Team, 90th Troop Command, works through a number of specific movements, including leaning forward, in order to test the effectiveness of her newly-issued N95 mask during a fit test, April 20, 2020. The 137th Bioenvironmental Engineering Office was responsible for 37 hours of mask fit testing for the 148 Oklahoma Army and Air National Guardsmen during the state's whole-of-government response to COVID-19.



An Oklahoma Army National Guardsman holds his tongue out as Oklahoma Air National Guard Tech. Sgt. Rebecca Keylon, a bioenvironmental engineering technician with the 137th Bioenvironmental Engineering Office at the 137th Special Operations Wing in Oklahoma City, sprays saccharine solution into a qualitative fit test hood during an N95 mask fit test, April 20, 2020. The initial spray without the respirator, pictured here, introduces the Guardsmen to the taste of the solution before donning their newly-issued N95 mask for the actual testing portion of the test.

“This is where we assess health hazards and quantify them to determine what kind of health effects members could expect to see acutely (short period of time) and long-term, as well,” said Keylon. “Think cancers, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or COPD, or hearing loss.”

This part of their mission finds 137th BE Airmen in a wide range of locations and environments, from industrial shops and firing ranges to flight lines and environmental protection offices.

The assessments happen in a series of steps: anticipate, analyze, evaluate, and control hazards. For the last step, 137th BE Airmen mitigate potential hazards through prioritized controls, which include engineering controls that remove the hazard altogether, administration controls that limit exposure through procedures and education, and then PPE controls that limit exposure through certified and protective barriers.

“One of the big things a lot of people don’t realize, because it very rarely happens, is we are trained to go into the hot zone to evaluate unknown hazards and help fire department and emergency management identify and quantify those hazards,” said Keylon. “This includes a Level A fully encapsulated suit and self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), just like fire department personnel wear.”

After these assessments, the 137th BE provides commanders with the results, which helps to better equip leadership to make informed decisions about the health impacts to members while also ensuring the mission continues.

The evaluations go one step further, and into the next part of their mission, by helping to determine the necessary medical monitoring needed to track exposures for each member. For example, Airmen working around loud noises or first responders who are exposed to unknown chemicals are tested for their amount of exposure and are monitored for effects over time.

“Because we are a jack-of-all-trades, we are able to measure and test for a multitude of things,” said Keylon. “As for noise, we can measure noise exposure from equipment, but we can also drill down further for specific Airmen and study what their noise exposure is over an entire day, not just a moment in time from one piece of equipment.”

The office also tests installation drinking water monthly, to include pH, chlorine and bacteria levels. They test for proper ventilation in garages; radiation levels on base and during hazard responses; electromagnetic frequency radiations from antennae and cable leaks; atmospheric levels for confined spaces; and dispersion levels for any chemicals with associated health hazards. They even have equipment to identify and quantify unknowns for both liquids and solids during hazard responses, and they measure the WetBulb Globe Temperature to send out the flag conditions for work and rest cycles.

“There are things that Airmen do in their jobs that are inherently dangerous,” said Keylon. “Some of those tasks are obvious and some are not. We work down in the weeds to ensure that workers’ exposures are not at a level that would or could cause acute injuries or health concerns and also identify if they might cause issues 10 or more years down the road. We also have a huge part in ensuring the base follows regulatory requirements, such as those from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.”

These requirements are especially important in the midst of the rapidly-changing conditions of emergency response — the most recent example being the Oklahoma Army and Air National Guard’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This pandemic definitely shifted priorities for our operations,” said Keylon. “Going back to allowing commanders to make informed decisions, there was a lot of ever-changing information coming down rapidly, and we had to make sure our wing commander had the pertinent information to make informed decisions for operations on base. We have also had to ensure that National Guardsmen have proper fit testing when wearing respirators during state response activities.”

Statewide, Guardsmen helped to staff the state’s Strategic National Stockpile, supplement food banks, support the Oklahoma State Department of Health with testing and contact tracing, decontaminate long-term healthcare facilities, work within the state’s joint task force, and transport COVID-19 tests. For the Guardsmen going into long-term healthcare facilities, the proper use of PPE — to protect both the Guardsmen and the residents — is paramount.

“So far, we have performed training and fit testing for N95s for 148 National Guard members,” said Keylon. “That includes both Army and Air. At roughly 15 minutes per test, you’re looking at 37 man-hours of testing completed. The BE office has also filled some roles for the Public Health office as we have had a recent vacancy there as well – it’s definitely been a steep learning curve.”

As regulations for safety increased, BE was responsible for communicating to leadership about things like mask wearing, social distancing, ventilation of buildings, cleaning procedures, proper PPE for COVID-19 tasks, and aircraft disinfection.

“Without proper communication of accurate information, informed decisions would not happen,” continued Keylon. “Without the proper protection, members working in areas where there is a potential for exposure could take out a whole team, which in turn hurts our community response. Providing proper protection allows for continuously healthy individuals able to complete the tasks assigned.”

With the approximately 1,100 Airmen assigned to the 137th SOW and the almost 300 Oklahoma Army and Air National Guardsmen activated for COVID-19, the five Airmen in the 137th BE office adjust for any mission.

“It’s definitely a big responsibility,” concluded Keylon. “Knowing if I do my job incorrectly or miss an important detail ... that could mean illness or injury to a Guardsman. So I definitely take my job seriously. I take pride in knowing I’m playing a role in preventing potential major health consequences for our Guardsmen and aiding in getting the mission accomplished safely.”

Blending in with the uniforms around them, armed with monitors, sensors and regulations, 137th BE Airmen may not look like your typical medical professionals, but they protect and prepare Guardsmen for any fight — anytime, anywhere — during daily operations, deployments overseas or unprecedented pandemics at home. **AO**

Q&A

PERSONAL STORIES OF GUARDSMEN IN THE COMMUNITY

Interview: **Staff Sgt. Brigitte A. Waltermire**



TECH. SGT. JORDAN A. ALMOHANDIS

WHY DID YOU JOIN THE GUARD?

I had always wanted to join the Guard. My dad retired out of the Oklahoma Air National Guard, out of air evacuation, and my mom was military as well, as an ICU nurse. I grew up around the Guard base (WRANGB). My mom was really involved in the kid's camp that they used to have and family days out there, so I was out there quite a bit. For me, I knew that I wanted to be in the military. I've always had a strong desire to serve my country, and I feel that the Oklahoma Air National Guard is a great way to do that. My brother is also in my unit, and he just graduated from medical school. So, we are definitely a Guard family.

WHAT CAREERS DO YOU HAVE AS A CIVILIAN AND A GUARDSMAN?

Civilian-wise, I'm a registered nurse in the emergency department. I work at Mercy Hospital. We see everything from tooth pain to a stubbed toe to cardiac arrest, or a heart attack to strokes.

Guard-wise, I am an aerospace medical technician, or a flight medical technician. I've always been a 4N. And I'm also part of the flight operational medical technicians. You start out doing vital signs and ask basic questions, and do the eye exams, electrocardiograms (EKG), that kind of stuff. I definitely spent about my first six years doing that, and once I became a seven level I was able to do the questionnaires – the health assessment questionnaires that we all fill out. Now, because I've gone to that school, I can review fliers as well as non-fliers.

WHAT HAS IT BEEN LIKE AS AN EMERGENCY ROOM NURSE WITH THE ADVENT OF COVID-19?

When you work in the ER, you kind of never know what's

going to come in the front door.

At our hospital, anything can walk through the front door. You can have your stroke walk through, you can have your heart attacks walk through ... you can have a person with COVID that you may not know has COVID come through the front door. That's what's changed, I guess. We are definitely wearing masks at all times. We will fully gown up and wear personal protective equipment (PPE) for all the patients that are possible COVID until they've been ruled out.

HAVE YOU EVER DEALT WITH A HEALTH ISSUE THAT IS THE SCALE OF COVID-19 BEFORE?

I've worked in the hospital for almost 10 years, and we've dealt with a lot of flu seasons – not that this is comparable by any means. Those tend to increase in the winter months, and so we have to just try and take care of our flu patients because it's all usually respiratory. So, it's comparable, but not quite the same.

We were definitely busy before COVID. Then once COVID hit, and the media started talking about not going to hospitals if they felt that it could be treated at home or in urgent care, then our numbers did decrease. But the acuity of our patients increased. So, we were seeing sicker patients, but we just weren't seeing as many patients.

WHAT HAVE THE DISPLAYS OF SUPPORT, LIKE FIRST RESPONDER PARADES OF LIGHTS OR THE AMERICA STRONG FLYOVERS, MEANT TO YOU?

It's kind of been a little overwhelming at times. It's been amazing. So many places have brought food, people have written with chalk on the concrete whenever you walk in, there's been signs for us whenever you walk into the hospital ... It's nice to see the community has reached out, and it's

really helped with our morale around the hospital for sure.

HOW DO YOU HANDLE THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT COMES WITH BEING A GUARDSMAN AND AN ER NURSE, ESPECIALLY NOW?

I have a really strong support system. My husband is over-the-top. He's just always been there, no matter what – even on my rough days. If I ever needed anything or for him to listen, he's always there. My parents are the same way as well. If I ever need to talk to them, especially using medical terms, they understand everything, and so it's easy to talk to them if there are frustrating nights in the ER. My parents even understand the military aspect of it as well. I'm very, very lucky to have a very strong support system that understands that kind of perspective.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BEST PARTS ABOUT YOUR JOBS?

I'm really thankful that I'm actually able to do it. I love being a nurse. I feel like being a nurse is not one of those things you could do if you didn't enjoy what you did. I love the aspect of being in a teamwork setting. And I feel both being medical and in the military, it's very much a teamwork aspect. There are a lot of people that are not able to be in the military and not able to handle social situations like being in the military, or being an ER nurse — or a nurse at all, actually. And I've been very blessed to be able to learn how to handle certain situations. Both of my parents are registered nurses, so we grew up talking medical around the dinner table. I've always wanted to help people. And, I feel that being an emergency room nurse, I'm able to reach out to our community and help.

Let Me Tell You

SEVEN AIRMEN SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES DURING DOMESTIC OPERATIONS

Interviews: Staff Sgt. Brigitte A. Waltermire

HURRICANE KATRINA, 2005



CAPT. DASHA JOHNSON
137th Special Operations Medical Group

I was a senior airman at the time, and I was excited to have the opportunity to contribute to the efforts, so I said “Yes, I’ll go.” Our crew consisted of nurses and medical technicians who initially helped transport litters of patients closer to the fixed-wing aircraft side of the airport.

There was one elderly lady by the name Hazel who I still remember to this day. She could not walk without assistance and was stuck in her chair for days. Her skin was in terrible shape because of the moisture she was sitting in. After getting her cleaned up, it solidified for me that I am called to be in the medical field. I journaled during the Katrina efforts, and one of the entries said, “She [Hazel] made me understand why I was here.” I will never forget that humbling experience as long as I live.

MASTER SGT. YVONNE PAYNE
137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron

For Hurricane Katrina, I was working at a bank when I got the call asking if we could be there within two hours. We had brought supplies and normal equipment from Oklahoma to the hospital that had been set up in the New Orleans airport, but found we were going to triage and transport people out. We had a piece of notebook paper that we were writing down names on and where they were going, then we evacuated them before flying back to Oklahoma City.

After that, we were notified that we would be going back for a couple of weeks to stay and help with patient care and movement at the airport. Our job ended up being more patient movement than care. It’s very odd how you become friends and family during situations like that. It was a great opportunity to learn and gain experience ... to see how great people are and how they come together in a disaster.



MOORE TORNADO, 2013



TECH. SGT. ISRAEL POIRE
137th Special Operations Security Forces Squadron

I was on my way to work in the command and control center for all base defense operations when I saw the debris cloud on my way to the base. I spent the first few hours of that shift making notifications, conducting accountability, coordinating requests from leadership, and recalling personnel to stand up the Emergency Operations Center and to assemble the first wave of Air National Guard responders.

I worked for two days after the tornado had struck then was put on state active duty orders on May 22. While in Moore, I helped to secure the scene of Plaza Towers Elementary and surrounding neighborhoods. The 2013 response and recovery operations in Moore helped me to better appreciate how pivotal teamwork is to the success or failure of a mission.



MOORE TORNADO, 2013 (cont.)

CAPT. GABRIEL BIRD
185th Special Operations Squadron

We were still a new unit (146th ASOS), a bit of an unknown commodity at the time, so we knew that our capabilities may not be considered. But we knew that we brought a lot of versatility and that our assistance would be useful. And like any resident that day, if there was a way to help, you didn’t hesitate. Each TACP served as the primary communicator and coordinator for ten-to-twelve-member search and rescue teams. Emergency personnel relied on satellite imagery and street map data; but, with no street signs or reference marks remaining, it was unusable. Our guys had the ability to bring satellite imagery with military grid reference system overlays. What stood out to me most was the appreciation from those affected. For most, our guys were the first contact they had with someone after such a traumatic experience. I had never given so many hugs while wearing a helmet, night vision, and a rucksack full of equipment as I did that night.

MASTER SGT. JOHN DUTT
137th Special Operations Security Forces Squadron

For over two weeks, we worked in the hardest-hit areas of the city. It is hard to describe the sort of damage that I witnessed because there is nothing I can compare it to. There were cars stacked on top of cars, pieces of wood that had been lodged into cement and brick, houses were leveled and others were missing roofs, while wreckage littered every square foot of the disaster area ... And sadly, a lingering awareness that many people, including children, had died there. Overall, this experience helped me better understand the role of the Air National Guard in response to natural disasters, and our capability to provide a sense of security and support to our civilian partners and citizens of Oklahoma. This was my formative experience as a Guard member, and I am proud to have done my part for our state and fellow citizens.



MASTER SGT. CHRISTOPHER VAUGHAN
137th Special Operations Support Squadron

On the day of the tornado, we were operating normally until the weather turned bad. Some of the ASOS TACPs were sent out with two Humvees while the rest of us headed out with additional gear for nighttime operations. We assisted law enforcement and first responder search and rescue teams. A few years later, we were involved in a statewide exercise called “Vigilant Guardian.” Each corner of the state was in a different disaster that agencies collectively had to respond to and resolve. We had Airmen from our squadron simulate establishing high frequency communications when power/phone lines and cell towers were knocked out. These two events led to the 146th ASOS receiving a state mission. We showed how our communications can be used in a disaster and how it would be an asset anywhere in the state where a disaster may strike.



SENIOR MASTER SGT. LARRY MANSELL
146th Air Support Operations Squadron

I was at work at the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron when we got the news that a large tornado was forming southwest of Moore. We were proactive and had our full-time staff prepare for action. We met with local officials at their command base and volunteered our help. We started at Plaza Towers Elementary School and sector off the area using our map-reading skills to set an outer cordon perimeter. We pushed out from the school, looking for potentially trapped people or anyone who needed help. We were there 24 hours a day for around four days, starting directly after the tornado hit. We had drill status members of our own squadron volunteer during that time, as well as received help from members of the 138th Combat Training Flight (now the 137th Combat Training Flight).



OKLAHOMA STANDARD

Oklahoma has once again faced disaster in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hundreds of Oklahoma Guardsmen responded to help fulfill seven state missions as the nation fought to contain the spread of the virus. And while this virus continues to impact the state, one thing is clear: The Guard – alongside other Oklahomans – will continue to set the "Oklahoma Standard" in the face of this challenge as they always do. TOGETHER.

Stories and Photography: **Tech. Sgt. Kasey M. Phipps**

OKLAHOMA GOVERNOR ACTIVATES 175 SERVICE MEMBERS FROM OKLAHOMA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt activated 175 members of the Oklahoma Army and Air National Guard this week, to help support the state response to COVID-19.

The newly activated service members will perform several missions in support of the 11 identified COVID-19 regional health administration locations in the state.

“The governor has authorized 175 Soldiers and Airmen into the COVID-19 response in direct support of his number-one objective, which is ensuring that Oklahomans are taken care of during the COVID-19 outbreak,” Oklahoma Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Tommy Mancino, commander of the Governor's Solution Task Force, said.

Read more about this story [here](#).

OKLAHOMA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARDSMEN SUPPORT DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AT STRATEGIC NATIONAL STOCKPILE

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt assigned more than 25 Oklahoma National Guardsmen to assist the Oklahoma State Department of Health at the Strategic National Stockpile warehouse in Oklahoma City beginning April 13, 2020.

The Guardsmen, in conjunction with state agencies to include the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management, Oklahoma Department of Public Safety, Oklahoma Department of Transportation, Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security and the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, help fulfill, secure and transport orders of relief and medical supplies to facilities within the 11 identified COVID-19 regional health administration regions throughout Oklahoma as part of the State's whole-of-government response to the pandemic.

“We are here at a very important [time] for Oklahomans,” said Maj. Gen. Michael Thompson, the Adjutant General for Oklahoma. “This stockpile plays a tremendous role in the health of [the] citizens of Oklahoma. So, to be here and help distribute needed personal protective equipment across the state of Oklahoma is very critical. I'm glad that the Guard is here. It has an important role in that.”

Read more about this story [here](#).



Oklahoma Air National Guardsmen from the 137th Special Operations Wing help to sort, box, palletize and prepare food for transport to 53 of the 77 counties in Oklahoma in support of the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma in Oklahoma City, April 24, 2020. The food bank is just one operation of the Oklahoma National Guard's overall mission in support of Oklahoma's whole-of-government response to COVID-19.



Oklahoma Air National Guard Senior Master Sgt. Scherryl Coulter, a human resources specialist assigned to Joint Force Headquarters - Air Staff, confirms overall numbers and unit assignments of Oklahoma Army and Air National Guardsmen who have been activated by Oklahoma's Governor in response to COVID-19 while working within the Oklahoma Joint Task Force at the Multiagency Coordination Center in Oklahoma City, April 14, 2020. Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt activated 175 additional Oklahoma Army and Air National Guardsmen, April 13, 2020, to aid various missions in support of the state's response to COVID-19.



Oklahoma National Guard Spc. James Bates with Headquarters Company, 545th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, pulls an empty pallet to the front of the Strategic National Stockpile warehouse as he gathers equipment and medical supplies while assigned to the Stockpile warehouse in Oklahoma City, April 17, 2020. The nearly 30 Guardsmen assigned to the site — partnered with state agencies to include the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management, Oklahoma Department of Public Safety, Oklahoma Department of Transportation, Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security and the Oklahoma Department of Corrections — help fulfill, secure and transport the orders to facilities within the 11 identified COVID-19 regional health administration regions throughout Oklahoma as part of the State's whole-of-government response to the pandemic.

OKLAHOMA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARDSMEN JOIN VETERANS IN FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

This week, the Oklahoma National Guard provided 23 Guardsmen to disinfect the Norman Veterans Center, April 29, 2020, in support of the Oklahoma State Department of Health and as part of Oklahoma's whole-of-government response to COVID-19.

This mission was one of many assigned to the Oklahoma National Guard by Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt in order to help protect the State's most vulnerable populations against the pandemic. But for the Guardsmen, this particular operation hit closer to home.

"It's a pretty incredible feeling being able to come out here, especially being able to give back in a facility like this," said Oklahoma Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Ron Poland, liaison noncommissioned officer for the 63rd Civil Support Team and its response to COVID-19. "The Veterans Center does incredible work and the residents of this facility have given so much more than most of us [will ever realize]."

Read more about this story [here](#).



Oklahoma Army and Air National Guardsmen line a stairway as they use Disease Control and Prevention-approved methods to disinfect a stairway of the Norman Veterans Center in Norman, Oklahoma, April 29, 2020. Guardsmen were at the center to disinfect commonly-touched surfaces and high-traffic areas including handrails, chair arms, tables, switches and elevator buttons, split up into three teams, in order to more efficiently cover all of the common areas of the 275,000 square-foot facility. Using pressure sprayers and hand sprayers filled with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-approved disinfectants, the teams worked from the back of the facility to the front. The residents' military service spans from World War II to Operation Desert Storm.

OKLAHOMA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD CONTINUES STATE SUPPORT THROUGH REOPENING

As Oklahoma's whole-of-government response to COVID-19 progresses, so does the Oklahoma Army and Air National Guard's mission.

As of May 6, 2020, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt activated 360 Guardsmen to assist their fellow Oklahomans, alongside state agencies such as the Oklahoma State Department of Health and Regional Food Banks.

"Regarding the COVID-19 response, the Oklahoma National Guard is basically responding to all facets of the response for the State," said Col. Robert Walter, Oklahoma National Guard joint task force commander. "We're helping in pretty much every area that we can, so we'll continue to do that and continue to support Oklahomans as required and at the Governor's behest."

Read more about this story [here](#).



Oklahoma Air National Guardsmen from the 137th Special Operations Wing help to sort, box, palletize and prepare food for transport in support of the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma in Oklahoma City, April 24, 2020. Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt activated 25 additional Guardsmen in Oklahoma City and another 25 in Tulsa to assist the regional food banks with packing and shipping of food products. Food banks across the State have seen an increase of as much as 60 percent in the need for food assistance. The food bank is just one operation of the Oklahoma National Guard's overall mission in support of Oklahoma's whole-of-government response to COVID-19.

OKLAHOMA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD SUPPORTS STATE HOTSPOT THROUGH COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Oklahoma Air and Army National Guardsmen from throughout Oklahoma, alongside the Oklahoma State Department of Health and other state and federal agencies, are helping to control the spread of COVID-19 in some of the State's most affected areas, which now includes Guymon, Oklahoma.

As of May 19, 2020, Guymon had 650 confirmed cases of COVID-19, making it second in the total number of cases in Oklahoma. Oklahoma City, which has the highest number of COVID-19 cases, has the largest population of any city in Oklahoma, Guymon is 40th. The testing site was the first in the hotspot city to be open to all residents and not just those with doctor referrals.

"We have what they term a 'hotspot' or an 'outbreak' of COVID-19 in Guymon," said Terri Salisbury, Oklahoma State Department of Health regional director. "We are utilizing the National Guard to assist us, because we have more than 600 cases. Not only do we have to test even more of the population in order to identify all the positives, but we also have to notify those cases and the contacts in order for isolation to occur."

Read more about this story [here](#).



Oklahoma Army and Air National Guardsmen, under direction of Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt and alongside healthcare workers from the Oklahoma State Department of Health, help conduct COVID-19 testing at the Texas County Activity Center in Guymon, Oklahoma, May 16, 2020. As of May 19, 2020, Guymon had 650 confirmed cases of COVID-19, making it second in the total number of cases in Oklahoma. Oklahoma City, which has the highest number of COVID-19 cases, has the largest population of any city in Oklahoma. Guymon is 40th. The testing site was the first in the hotspot city to be open to all residents and not just those with doctor referrals.

OKLAHOMA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD SUPPORTS STATE-WIDE COVID-19 CONTACT TRACING

Members of the Oklahoma Army and Air National Guard are supporting the Oklahoma State Department of Health in fulfilling Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt's continued efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19 throughout the State.

In this latest push, Oklahoma Guardsmen, like so many other Guardsmen throughout the U.S., help with contact tracing, which is the process of tracing and monitoring the contacts of infected people within the State, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We're minimizing the spread and helping with the community..." said Oklahoma Army National Guard Sgt. Anna Aranda, a member of the 120th Forward Support Company, 45th Field Artillery Brigade, located in Altus, Oklahoma. She is the noncommissioned officer in charge for the Guardsmen working at the Texas County Health Department in Guymon, Oklahoma. "We're working closely with the Oklahoma State Department of Health and making a tremendous impact with them. You know, they needed our help and so we're here."

Read more about this story [here](#).



Oklahoma Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Shawntoria Miles, a medic with the 137th Special Operations Medical Group in Oklahoma City, calls an individual as part of contact tracing operations at the the Texas County Health Department in Guymon, Oklahoma, May 15, 2020, in a multi-agency effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 within the State. Oklahoma Guardsmen, like so many other Guardsmen throughout the U.S., have been helping with contact tracing, which is the process of tracing and monitoring the contacts of infected people within the State, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

AIR OBSERVER

the biannual journal of the 137th special operations wing

NEXT ISSUE MARCH 2021